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SOCIAL SURVEYS AS A BASIS OF INSTRUCTION

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To teach in terms of one's environment is the problem that is uppermost in the institute and summer-school discussions the country over. The usual practice is to give general directions as to how such instruction should be given, followed by a few concrete illustrations. No definite plan or method of procedure is outlined by which the average teacher can work out his instructional problems in terms of his environment.

For the past few years the writer has been developing a plan in summer-school classes and in certain rural districts which has proved a valuable aid to the teacher not only in vitalizing the content of the school subjects but also in assuming a position of leadership in the community.

Many surveys have been made both of social, political, and industrial conditions and of schools and educational systems. Various reforms have resulted from such educational surveys. They have served as a guide for eliminations from or additions to the course of study. They have awakened interest in education and have helped to eliminate waste. They have built up a wholesome educational pride in communities and have stimulated healthy competition. But thus far the most useful purpose to which most surveys, if properly made, may be put has been entirely overlooked. In the two or three hundred social, industrial, and educational surveys which he has examined, the writer can find no instance where any of these surveys has been made with the idea of utilizing the results directly in the classroom as a means of instructing in terms of the child's environment. This neglected use of the survey is one of the most constructive purposes which it can serve.

Especially is the survey plan here described suitable for rural districts and small communities, although by making certain modifications it may be employed in complex city systems.

Before beginning the actual survey work the teacher should secure from the county surveyor's office a blank map, upon which is marked off at least one township with section and quarter-section lines. This map should be taken to the county superintendent's office and the boundaries of the school district traced. From the county assessor's office is secured the names of the owners of the various pieces of property. This procedure not only gives the teacher an idea of the number actually owning property in the district, but also supplies a method of checking up the number of renters and other non-property-holders. Each child in the school from the fourth grade on may profitably make such a map under the direction of the teacher, and it will later serve as a basis for constructive community work.

It has been the experience of the writer that the blanks commonly used for church or social survey work are too comprehensive and too cumbersome for educational purposes. They require too much of the teacher's time, and the facts gathered do not lend themselves readily to classroom use. It has been found more satisfactory to make survey plans for single topics such as wheat, sheep, soil, poultry, dairy cattle, beef cattle, roads, health and sanitation, etc. The following is an outline of such a survey plan on health and sanitation:

1. Owner
 - Number of adults
 - Number of children
2. Location of house, higher or lower than all other buildings
 - Exceptions
 - Number of feet to barns
 - Number of feet to outhouse
3. Water supply
 - Kind
 - How protected
 - Number of feet from barns
 - Number of feet from outhouse
 - Number of feet from house
4. Condition of premises
 - Garbage and slops, how cared for
 - Manure, how cared for
 - Other breeding places for flies and mosquitoes

- Cleanliness of cow before milking
- Care of milk
- Premises free from rats and mice
- Pigs and chickens fenced
- 5. Interior of home
 - How heated
 - Evenness of temperature
 - How ventilated
 - Window boards used
 - How lighted at night
 - Sink in kitchen
 - Kind of drain
 - Door and windows screened
- 6. Common diseases for last three years
 - Name and number of cases
- 7. Cost of sickness
 - Cost of doctor
 - Cost of dentist
 - Cost of nurse
 - Cost of medicine
 - Number of working days lost on account of sickness
 - Number of deaths because of disease
 - Effect of poor health on work accomplished

Cards six by eight inches may be used. One card is needed for each family. Question No. 1 on the health and sanitation card can be answered in most cases by the teacher and pupils. The other blanks are to be filled in one at a time. The cards should be left in the schoolroom, filed alphabetically. Before dismissing school for the day, the teacher may ask each pupil to make a note of the points under Question No. 2 and to bring back the information the next day. The answers are then copied on the cards by the children, and before dismissal a copy is made of the items under Question No. 3. The next day Topic No. 4 is taken, and so on until all of the necessary information is secured.

If possible, the data concerning each topic should be secured before the next topic is taken up, even though a topic may take two or three days. In case some families have no children in school and no pupil passes by these homes, the teacher may have to secure the information. These instances, however, will be few, and in such cases the entire card may be filled out at one time.

It is not advisable to have the pupil take the card home, for it may be soiled or lost. Besides, when the whole array of questions on the card is shown at one time, the parents may refuse to take the time to fill it out entirely.

As soon as all of the information is secured, the data should be transferred to a summary card so that the results of the survey may be more readily used for classroom purposes.

The method of using this material in instruction may be illustrated by reference to the work in arithmetic. Besides the cards and the summary a textbook and a copy of the state, county, or local course of study will be needed. However, the textbook and the course of study merely serve as guides and should be regarded and used as such the greater part of the time. For example, in the textbook, in addition to the divisions of the subject under consideration, the material is graded according to the ability of the pupils. The number of pages devoted to a topic or division in the textbook indicates the importance of the subject and the emphasis that should be given to it. The textbook also contains illustrative material to make clear the principles set forth. In arithmetic this material consists of problems which are bound to be imaginary and consequently more or less abstract. To say that a cow gives so many quarts of milk per day is making an abstract statement if the cow is imaginary; but if the statement is made concerning a certain cow which belongs to one of the pupils or to a neighbor, the fact becomes alive with interest. A course of study is supposed more nearly to fit local conditions, but it must still be like the textbook, more or less general in its directions. Both are merely guides.

With these two guides, the teacher may formulate problems from the data of the survey. For example, how much has the community paid for the services of doctors, dentists, and nurses and for medicine for the past three years? How much would this amount invested at 6 per cent interest yield annually? How many working days has the community lost by sickness? Find out from a study of the survey cards what percentage of the total amount spent by the community was spent by a given family.

Beginning with the family spending the least, list all of the others in order. What is the average amount spent annually?

What is the cost of a screen door? Window screens? What is the average cost per family for screen doors and window screens? How does this cost compare with the cost of sickness in the average family? One could go on almost indefinitely evolving problems which have to do with the lives of the pupils and the entire community.

By using the textbook and the course of study as guides these problems may be readily arranged according to grades. They should be written on cards and filed. The box should be labeled "Arithmetic," and nothing but arithmetic problems should be filed in it. From time to time these problems may be added to, all problems intended for use in a given grade being filed together.¹ Similarly, boxes with index cards should be prepared for history, geography, hygiene, reading, composition, agriculture, etc. Before each division of any subject, such as multiplication in arithmetic or soils in agriculture, is completed, problems from the textbook may be given so as to generalize the ideas gained.

When the material of one survey has been worked over, another survey may be made and utilized in the same manner. Such topical surveys may be made until the entire social, industrial, and civic life of the community is analyzed. These surveys and problems are left in the school at the close of the year. If a new teacher comes in, this material furnishes first-hand knowledge of the community. The cards and problems may be revised each September and brought up to date, and then new surveys begun. In a few years a veritable mine of local material for teaching purposes will be available. A copy of the summary of each survey should be filed with the county superintendent or supervisor who can use it for comparison or to stimulate competition among the teachers.

The results secured from such work are numerous. When the child enters school, the knowledge he possesses has been gained mostly from contacts in the home and through daily activities. The school supposedly organizes this knowledge and builds upon it. In too many cases this is not done, and the natural sequence

¹ Some have found it desirable to file the problems by divisions of the subject; that is, all problems in addition are filed together; and all in subtraction, multiplication, division, percentage, interest, etc., are likewise filed separately.

is broken. The method here described enables him, as the horizon broadens, to advance logically from the known to the unknown. He does not need to be told to study this or that subject because of future needs, for he sees the use daily and more intensively as he grows older, and an ever quickening and increasing source of initiative is supplied.

In addition, the life-career motive is always present. By means of such surveys information concerning many different vocations is brought to light, and the service of these vocations to humanity may be discussed. The civic spirit is brought into each subject, and even arithmetic becomes a part of civic instruction.

By such work the teacher becomes the possessor of facts which place him in a position of leadership. Through such information as the school possesses community interest may be awakened and constructive programs carried through in a sound manner.